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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4723
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE 0889
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000425

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ADDIS FOR USAU AMBASSADOR COURVILLE
DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/FO
DEPT FOR CA/OCS/ACS/AF - RBRANSON
DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF/E CKOLLMAR
PARIS FOR D'ELIA
PRETORIA FOR RCO MVEASY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/02/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PBTS](#) [MASS](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [CN](#)
SUBJECT: UNION AND ANJOUAN FORCES FINALLY CLASH IN COMOROS

REF: A. SIBLEY-OPS CTR CONF CALL MAY 2 1900 LOCAL TIME

- [1](#)B. MCGEE-COURVILLE TELCOM 1800 LOCAL TIME
- [1](#)C. TRENKLE-NEUBERT EMAIL 4/25/2007
- [1](#)D. ANTANANARIVO 420
- [1](#)E. 06 ANTANANARIVO 1441
- [1](#)F. 06 ANTANANARIVO 1435
- [1](#)G. 06 ANTANANARIVO 1410
- [1](#)H. 06 ANTANANARIVO 1307

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JAMES D. MCGEE FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The political tension in the Union of the Comoros that has been simmering in recent months between the rival jurisdictions of the Union Government of President Ahmed Abdallah Sambi and the Anjouan Island government headed by "President" Mohamed Bacar has finally broken into violence. Following Bacar's refusal to step down before running for Island reelection (Ref C), Bacar's forces are reported to have attacked - and routed -- the small Union army contingent on Anjouan. Post does not have reliable reports of casualties, but has heard the Union President's offices on Anjouan had come under mortar fire. Post has spoken with the one American citizen visiting Anjouan, who is safe and seeking shelter at the Consul of Madagascar's residence. The international community, including the African Union (AU) representative to the Comoros, was meeting in Moroni, the capital on Grand Comore, to discuss possible solutions. The Director of the National Police asked our Defense Attache's Office for military and/or diplomatic support, but we have not been in direct contact with President Sambi. Radio Anjouan has declared a state of emergency and a week-long dusk-to-dawn curfew. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (U) The political tension that has been simmering in recent months between the Union Government and President Mohamed Bacar of Anjouan has finally come to a head. The Constitutional Court's decision April 27 that Island President Bacar should have resigned from office April 14 in order to run for reelection on June 10, followed by Union President Sambi's designation of Houmadi Kaambi (President of Anjouan's Assembly) as Interim President of Anjouan (REF C), led Bacar and his security forces on Anjouan to finally respond. The other two islands, Grande Comore and Moheli, are reported to be completely calm and peaceful. On Anjouan, however, Bacar's radio station has reportedly called a

week-long state of emergency with dusk-to-dawn curfews.

¶3. (C) Interim President of Anjouan Kaambi publicly announced May 1 he had formed an interim government and would not work with Bacar's authorities. That evening, Bacar announced he would not step down from office. He stated that, according to the Constitution of Anjouan, he is the "only true candidate" as he has 40 signatures supporting his candidacy. By contrast, the Constitution of the Union does not make any reference to a candidate's need for signatures. Post also heard reports Bacar announced he will not be holding island elections.

¶4. (SBU) On the morning of May 2, Bacar's security forces -- armed with heavy weapons -- closed Anjouan's airport and seaport. Post has received conflicting reports over exactly how the conflict started, but the shooting began at approximately 1530 between Bacar's forces (numbering approximately 1,200) and the Union army contingent already stationed in Anjouan (numbering approximately 60) around civilian buildings in Hombo, a town neighboring the island capital of Mutsamudu. Union soldiers had reportedly arrested Bacar's Ministers of Finance, Economy, and Social Affairs to remove them from power. Bacar's forces responded by attacking the Union Palace (the headquarters of the Union Forces) and Union Government radio stations, firing mortars at the Union Palace and taking back the arrested Ministers. An American citizen reported hearing single shots, long repeated bursts of machine gun fire, and at least seven to eight mortar rounds -- reports confirmed by local Anjouan residents and the Chief of Police on Grand Comores. Bacar's forces reportedly entered the Hombo hospital to better position themselves to fight the Union forces across the street.

ANTANANARI 00000425 002 OF 002

¶5. (U) Post has heard reports of four to five people injured in the shooting and no deaths to date, but most observers have suggested the number will rise once there is time to take stock. Residents are reported to be fleeing the town for safety. Schools, stores and markets are closed throughout the island. Local residents note Anjouan has not seen this level of conflict since the last "secession crisis" in 1997.

¶6. (C) The Secretary General of Vice President Idi's office in Moroni, contradicting earlier reports, said that no Union troops have been dispatched to reinforce their outnumbered comrades in Anjouan, at least for now. If Union troops are dispatched from Moroni, they will face conflict upon entry, as Bacar's forces have closed the airport and are restricting incoming boats at the port. The American citizen reported seeing Bacar's forces at the seaport carrying rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPGs) on their shoulders.

¶7. (C) Post has spoken with the one American citizen on Anjouan. Unable to leave the island by plane or boat earlier today, he is currently staying at the Consul of Madagascar's residence in Anjouan and feels he is in no imminent danger. He stated, "I can stay here for a week if need be." We advised him to stay out of sight until the security situation improves.

¶8. (C) The international community -- including the AU representative, the French, Libyan, and South African Ambassadors, the EU liaison, the IMF, the WHO, and the local hire U.S. Embassy liaison to Comoros -- have held several meetings throughout the afternoon with the Comoran Vice Presidents and Chief of the Army. All parties agreed Bacar's actions are "unacceptable" and amount to an attack on the Union's sovereignty. The international community intends to meet again on May 3 to review the situation on the ground and reevaluate possible actions to defuse the conflict. They report that the African Union "Peace and Security" division was also meeting in Addis Ababa to review possible next

steps. The French are reportedly advocating a "hands off" approach for the time being.

19. (C) COMMENT: Ten years ago, when Anjouan attempted to secede from the Union, the African Union - with particular leadership from South Africa and Mauritius - managed to broker the truce that restored the Union. At the time Anjouan had a plausible complaint that it was being dominated, politically and economically, by its larger neighbor Grande Comore. Part of the compromise was a loosely federated state that preserved substantial independence for the island governments. The other part was the concept of a Union Presidency that would rotate among Comoros' three islands. Today, Union President Sambi comes from Anjouan, making the complaint of "domination" far less persuasive. Instead, Island President Bacar comes across as a warlord, fearful that he would lose his fiefdom in a free and fair election. Bacar has been in conflict with the Union in the past, particularly - on an issue of U.S. policy concern - in his continuing issuance of "illegal" licenses to offshore banking entities. If he is allowed to retain control of Anjouan on this occasion a de facto secession will have occurred. Post will seek to communicate directly with President Sambi on May 3 and report his views of the situation. In the meantime, our support of any African Union effort to prevent this outcome would be helpful to resolve the crisis. END COMMENT.

McGEE